[Sharjah bazaar]

products of Bombay and Birmingham—gaily-hued sarongs, shirts and scarfs—vie with cloths of native weave, and woollen cloaks washed, spun and woven in Dubai. Most of the drapers have a little haberdashery section, comprising pins, scissors, reels of cotton, tape and ribbons, in a glass case.

Foreign visitors usually find most delight in the carpet shops, where rugs from Ispahan, Sheraz, Kerman and Bushire lie in neat piles on the wooden floor; rugs of exquisite dyes and patterns may be obtained by those who are willing to pay the high prices demanded to-day—sometimes a hundred per cent higher than they were before the war. Really old and valuable carpets are rare and can usually be obtained only in Persia or India. There is, of course, the inevitable fake; a modern carpet designed in the seventeenth century style, which has lain in the streets of Teheran until the feet of goats, donkeys, camels and humans have worn it into the 'antique' texture.

A good modern carpet, of delightful colour, design, weave and nap, measuring about eight feet long by five feet wide, can be bought for sixty or a hundred rupees, according to the quality. For the poor man, there are machine-made rugs and carpets of traditional design, made in India, which cost from twenty rupees upwards. It is always advisable, however, to seek the advice of an expert when buying carpets in Arabia.

The 'mixed' general shop is usually worth a visit, for here one may find the wristlet watch or fountain pen which one lost in mysterious circumstances. Watches of good Swiss or American make are on sale at reasonable prices; my own 'Novoris', which came from Sharjah, cost only four pounds. Fountain pens, sunglasses, rings and brooches, adorn the shelves side by side with Muscat daggers, canned goods and foreign cigarettes. Between every half-dozen booths is squeezed a café or coffee-shop, where the Arabs laze away the afternoon to discuss business or the affairs of the town. Nearly all business deals are talked over in the dark corners of a coffee-shop, where a wheezy portable gramophone screeches interminably the latest Arab love-songs, most of them discreetly pornographic.

I liked best to stand outside the bakers' booths and watch them make bread or rice-cakes. The dough would be kneaded and pummelled into shape in a bowl-shaped depression on a stone slab. When judged to be of the right consistency, it would be placed on a long-handled ladle, the blade of which is latticed like

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

[Sharjah bazaar]

Chow. These narrow, twisting streets have changed little in the last four or five centuries, and a similar scene must have presented itself to Haroun al Raschid as, disguised as a beggar, he crept through the dark thoroughfares of Baghdad. When I was in Sharjah I read that his palace had been excavated, but the Arabs with whom I discussed this interesting piece of archæology were not interested. They have a superstitious dislike of Haroun, and do not like to talk about the *Arabian Nights*, though I could never discover the reason for this.

The tailors make up most of the Arab *abbas* and *kufieyhs* from imported cloth of Indian manufacture; before the war a great deal of woollen and cotton fabrics came from Manchester, but it will probably be some time before the English piece-goods market is extended to Arabia again. We examined their wares; Indian-made shirts imported from Karachi, soft, woollen Kashmir shawls with hand-embroidered designs of birds and flowers in glowing colours; rich silks, sarongs and turbans, and large bales of coloured cloth for Arab children.

The streets are always congested at this hour. Not only Arabs, but goats and donkeys, throng the narrow ways, so that one continually brushes shoulders with the crowd and cannot avoid its inescapable stench. The peasant women seem dirtier than the men; this is presumably because their black cotton garments do not show the dirt, and are therefore seldom washed. Many of the younger women walked about unveiled and, in spite of their belladonna-stained eyes and henna-red lips, some of them were astonishingly lovely. They gave us coquettish glances as we passed, but even the most amorously-inclined Westerner would lose his ardour if he inhaled the nauseating odour of their persons.

Before we left Sharjah, Hassan suggested that we should take a cup of Turkish tea, so we sauntered into an open-air tea shop and sat on hard benches polished by much use. A handsome young Arab brought us tall, narrow glasses containing very sweet, warm tea, unclouded by milk; it was very aromatic and agreeable. The benches were arranged in a square, in the centre of which were stalls displaying cakes and sweetmeats, a large urn, and the inevitable gramophone. An old Arab sat smoking his hubble-bubble and changing the records; in return for this service he was supplied by the proprietor with free tea. The words of the songs, which Hassan translated for our benefit, were mostly concerned with the plaintive laments of unsuccessful lovers, suggesting that the crooner's

2: O'Shea G-8 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

533 complaint is not confined to the B.B.C. I have heard similar
265 songs in China and Oklahoma, and assume that unrequited love is a global ailment.

At a sign from Hassan, the old record-player began to play some tangos which took me back to the late twenties, and the audience began to smile broadly and drummed on the tables with
265 their fingers in response to the rhythm. Most of the café habitués
517 were business men and shopkeepers, who assembled there daily
521 to discuss stocks and prices. Two of them came to sit by us and the conversation, directed by the learned Hassan, turned to religion, or rather the differences of the Mohammedan and Christian versions. The similarity between certain passages of the Koran and those of the Bible were seized upon, and a bearded patriarch confessed with a twinkle in his eyes that the Prophet had been well-informed in the gospel of Christ and, as all knew who had read both holy books, had derived not a little inspiration from the parables.

771 The essential differences of the two religions lay in their conception of morality; thus some Christian concepts of human behaviourism, such as the negation of violence and vengeance, are diametrically opposed to the tenets of Islam. The Koran has a great deal of beauty, however, and its teaching of brotherly love and its philosophy of man's essential one-ness in the sight of God, alone have given it a deserved immortality. A really good Mohammedan is, in some ways, better than a good Christian; he will certainly die for his religion, if needs be, and his concept of life is far less material than that of the confirmed church-goer.

000 Hassan mentioned several Englishmen who have been converted to Islam, among them the late Lord Headley, President of the British Muslim Society, and the patriarch told us, to our great surprise, that he had made a journey to London some years ago and visited the mosque at Woking. He had a very great admiration for Lord Headley, a Haji who had made the pilgrimage to Mecca, and whom he regarded as sincere and devout.

The sun was sinking below the house-tops, gilding the streets with a golden haze, so after shaking hands with the merchants and making our salaams, we rose and departed back to the Fort.